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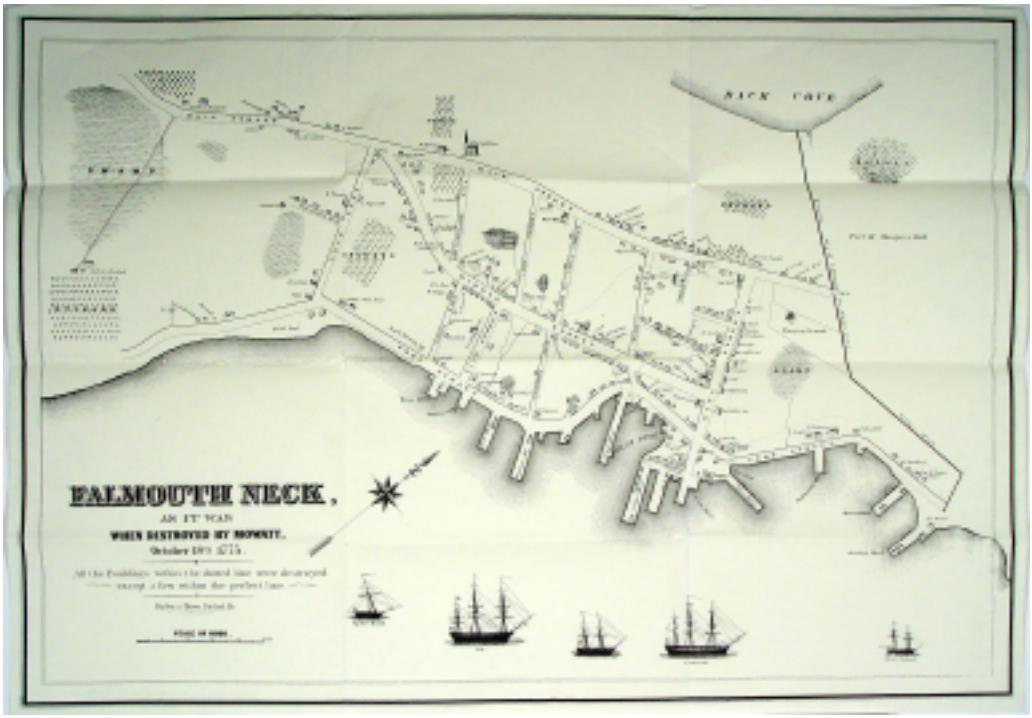


Falmouth, the seat of Cumberland County, experienced an economic boom in the late colonial period. It was home to hundreds of poor, menial, free laborers and dozens of slaves, whose labor was exploited by the town's landowners and merchants. Maine Historical Society Collections.

A COMPANY OF SHADOWS: SLAVES AND POOR FREE MENIAL LABORERS IN CUMBERLAND COUNTY, MAINE, 1760 – 1775

By Charles P.M. Outwin

Although slaves and poor, free menial laborers were by no means a majority of the population in late colonial-era Maine, they represented a culturally and socioeconomically significant part of commercial society there, especially at Falmouth in Casco Bay (now Portland) and in coastal Cumberland County. This essay uncovers the lives of the Falmouth's small slave population and its larger poor menial laborer population from 1760 up to the port city's destruction by the British in 1775. The author was granted a Ph.D. in history from the University of Maine in 2009. He is a member of the Maine Historical Society, the New England Historical Association, and Phi Alpha Theta.

FOR Massachusetts' Maine District, the Seven Years' War was all but over by the end of 1760. After a brief and shallow postwar economic slow-down, Falmouth in Casco Bay, seat of Maine's newly-formed Cumberland County, experienced a period of tremendous economic boom that lasted until the port's destruction by a small squadron of the Royal Navy in October 1775. This prosperity was due principally to the exploding demand for forest products throughout the British Empire. Falmouth and coastal Cumberland County also thereby experienced a corresponding rise in demand for labor, especially in such enterprises as shipbuilding and the processing of forest products.

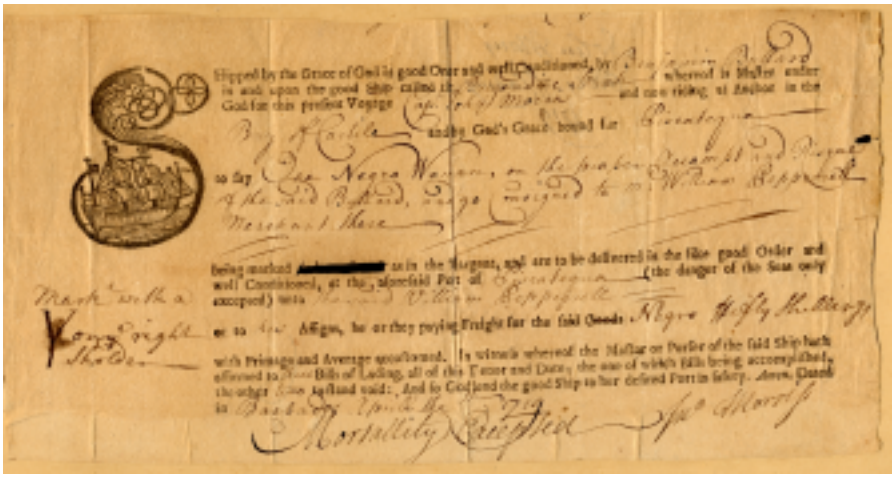
The most intractable predicament faced by business enterprises in mid-eighteenth century British North America was a chronic shortage of labor. During the colonial era, at least, Europeans did not freely immigrate to North America with the object of becoming mere laborers. They came dreaming of land, of position, and of wealth. Ultimate fulfillment of that original motivating vision of New World riches eluded too many settlers. A number descended into landless poverty, and they left

few traces of themselves behind when they departed. Slaves, brought in to supplement or even replace free poor laborers, had from the beginning no prospects at all or any social standing beyond that of the family they served.[1]

The number of craftsmen and their apprentices in Falmouth, somewhat less than one hundred persons, was insufficient to meet the need for heavy, semi-skilled, and unskilled labor there.[2] It may reasonably be deduced, then, that menial laborers, whether enslaved or the free poor, constituted a large portion of the region's population, perhaps even a majority, if only as transients.[3] In other words, since Falmouth experienced an economic boom during most of the 1760s and early 1770s, and because the "mechanics" and their trainees in town were not numerous enough to meet all labor demands beyond that requiring skilled labor, the labor shortage had to be made up by someone, and that was solved by the use of semi-skilled and unskilled slaves and by poor, free menial labor. Their brawn was needed to harvest and process timber and crops, to load and unload ships, to fetch and carry raw and finished materials, to assist in heavy construction and demolition, to clean sites, workshops, and homes, and to generally carry on with all the considerable demands put upon unskilled labor.

It is at this point that the main problem facing historians arises: lack of evidence, documentary or material. Although the lives of some of the wealthiest and most influential Falmouth inhabitants are very well documented, evidence for others is scarcer. For slaves, any sort of data is scanty indeed; for poor free menial laborers, it is almost non-existent. While some residents, such as Samuel Waldo, Brigadier General Jedediah Preble, the Reverend Thomas Smith, and Samuel Freeman, stand out clearly in the records, the life records of too many others, especially slaves and free poor laborers, are obscured by lack of clear substantiation. Only suggestions of personalities emerge from the large gray area caused by such indeterminate or insufficient particulars – a company of shadows, if you will. One encounters considerable difficulty in ascertaining hard facts, such as population figures or living conditions, about poor menial laborers and slaves in Falmouth.

Because of this marginalization, we have only an ambiguous indication of the actual numbers of unskilled workers and the enslaved in coastal Cumberland County between 1760 and 1775. There is very little record at all for the free poor workforce, except when individuals got into trouble with the constabulary or (far more rarely) when they had a child christened. The local constabulary, under the direction of the Cumberland County sheriff, might issue writs or summonses against the

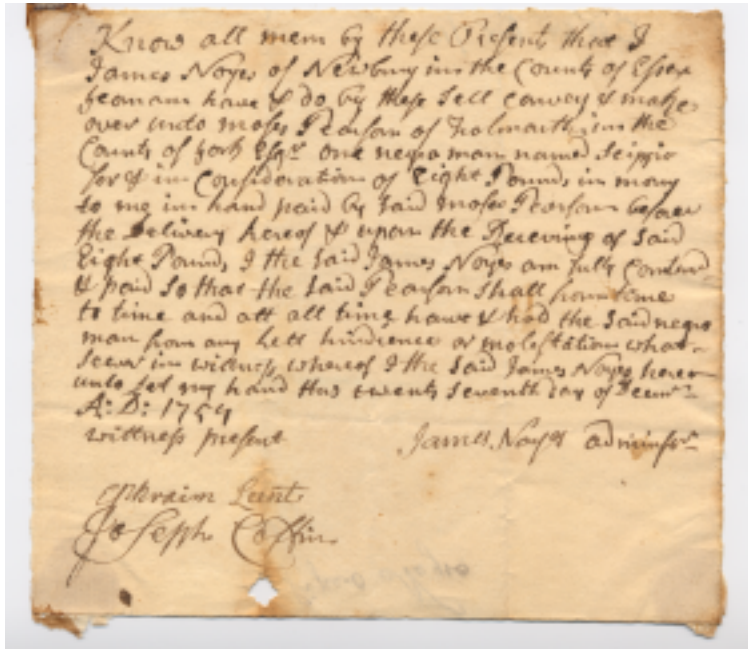


Shipped by the Grace of God in good Order and well Conditioned, by [illegible] wherof is Master under God for this present Voyage [illegible] and now riding at Anchor in the [illegible] and by God's Grace bound for [illegible] to say One Negro Woman [illegible] being marked [illegible] and are to be delivered in the like good Order and well Conditioned, at the aforesaid Port of [illegible] (the danger of the Seas only excepted) unto [illegible] or to his Assigns, he or they paying Freight for the said Goods [illegible] with Primage and Average accustomed. In witness wherof the Master or Purser of the said Ship hath affirmed to [illegible] Bills of Lading, all of this Tenor and Date, the one of which Bills being accomplished, the other [illegible] to stand void. And so God send the good Ship to her desired Port in safety. Amen. Dated in [illegible] the [illegible] 1719

Facing a severe shortage of labor, many landowning colonists turned to African slavery by the late seventeenth century. Although slavery was more prominent in the southern and middle colonies, there were slaves in New England, as this 1719 bill of lading attests. The female slave was brought from Barbados and sold to William Pepperell, who lived along the Piscataqua River. Maine Historical Society Collections.

poor laborers, courts might find them guilty of infractions of the law, or their punishment might be noted, but then there is usually no other record. The free laboring poor did not tend to be members of any formal organization, did not attend school, did not pay taxes, and were not likely to have a recorded burial anywhere in Cumberland County.

It is therefore, necessarily, "negative evidence," and not concrete proof, that suggests the presence of large numbers of free poor. Indirect substantiation, as indicated by the demonstrated needs of a mid-eighteenth century labor-intensive colonial society, can help clear the picture a little. Some free poor menial labor was probably supplied by common seamen idled between voyages. Other menial laborers may have arrived on a seasonal basis to cut wood or to help harvest crops, as is suggested later in this article. These free menial laborers were unquestionably marginalized. The lack of documentary evidence alone suggests that. Because they were considered legally movable property, the lives of slaves were somewhat better documented. Because they also tended to be resident in Falmouth and Cumberland County for much longer periods of time than free but poor transient laborers, anecdotes grew up around some of them, and their names and artifacts can appear in connection with records of the households or enterprises they served.


Know all men by these Present that I James Noyes of Newbury in the County of Essex Yeoman have & do by these Sell convey & make over unto Moses Pearson of Falmouth in the County of York Esqr one negro man named Scipio for & in Consideration of Eight Pounds in money to me in hand paid by said Moses Pearson before the delivery hereof & upon the Receiving of said Eight Pound, I the said James Noyes am fully Contented & paid So that the said Pearson shall from time to time and at all time hereafter have & hold the said negro man from any Let hindrance or molestation what-soever in witness whereof I the said James Noyes have-unto set my hand this twenty Seventh day of Decemr A: D: 1759
Witness present
James Noyes admirs
Ephraim Sweet
Joseph Coffin

Because they were considered chattel, slaves were often better documented than free menial laborers. This 1759 bill of sale transferred ownership of the slave Scipio from James Noyes to Moses Pearson of Falmouth for the price of eight pounds. Maine Historical Society Collections.

Slaves

As historian Meyer Weinberg has noted, inequality was a defining feature of colonial American society. Slavery, the epitome of this inequality, gained a relatively early foothold in New England, beginning sometime in the early seventeenth century. A severe shortage of manpower made slavery seem both convenient and inevitable, because many North American entrepreneurs found the free, but poor, transient labor force inconsistent, though exploitable. By the third quarter of the eighteenth century, there were about fifteen to sixteen thousand slaves living in New England, with the largest concentrations in Rhode Island.[4]

From the beginning, the use of slaves was an economic expedient, mercilessly applied. According to historian Barbara Solow, "the assimilation of human beings as commodities" dehumanized them. Thus reduced, those commodities could be bought, sold, and transferred with complete moral indifference as highly valuable articles, ranging in price from a few hundred pounds for an unskilled black farm hand to many

thousands for a well-trained mulatto individual in the latter half of the eighteenth century. This was at first justified by an appeal to divinely sanctioned natural order, such as that found in the twenty-fifth chapter of the old-testament Book of Leviticus. After that, this logic was reinforced by legalisms and by rationalizations of economic requirement.[5]

It cannot be ignored that, particularly in colonial New England, there was also a certain compelling social status attached to ownership of a thrall, especially an expensive, skilled one. New Englanders had ready access to the cream of these through the hub of Rhode Island, which dominated the slave trade in New England during the latter half of the eighteenth century. Those in demand in New England were primarily high-priced, skilled domestic, industrial, or agricultural servants and children who could be easily brought up as personal attendants. These were mostly obtained in the West Indies or the mid-Atlantic colonies and channeled to Falmouth through Newport, Boston, and Portsmouth. Slaves sold in northern New England included full-blooded Africans born in the New World, many mulattos of all shades, and a few native-born West Africans.[6] There were African-born slaves in Maine, though not many, including some owned by Sheriff Moses Pearson of Falmouth and William McLellan, Senior, of Gorham. Traders kept careful records of the transfer of slave ownership, and large sums in currency or barter could be expected to change hands. Bills of sale for slaves were drawn up in painfully correct legal language, and this correctness extended to the way legislation was devised and law interpreted for the control of slaves. Owners were meticulous about documentation because slaves were expensive, especially the skilled domestic kind.[7]

Although there was some agricultural slavery in late colonial Cumberland County, most bondsmen and women there seem to have been owned by ministers, merchants, master mariners, lawyers, and physicians, or their wives and family members. Indeed, slaves in most of New England, including eastern Massachusetts and Maine, were employed primarily as cooks, butlers, scullery maids, servers, personal servants, and valets, though there were common laborers among them. The cold climate of the New England colonies made the use of slaves for agricultural work economically impractical, as the slaves would have only worked for half of the year.[8] At Falmouth in Casco Bay, the venerable Reverend Thomas Smith's journal is full of the accounts of fancy dinner parties, and the labor of slaves was, without doubt, an important part of these. The cook that prepared the extravagant meal served at Captain Richard Codman's house in 1774, described by John Adams, was proba-

bly enslaved. Throughout New England, the lifestyle of the colonial elite was made convenient, even luxurious, by slave labor. Talented enslaved individuals could even prove useful as medical or technical assistants, but those particular uses were rare. Such highly-trained individuals in Maine and New England, however, were generally owned by doctors, lawyers, ministers, or wealthy merchants.[9]

Although some slaves in New England may have developed a close relationship with their masters, no slave was pampered. All were one way or another exploited in the northern colonies, as they were in the southern colonies. Because of their small numbers, slaves were seen as less of a possible threat in Maine than in the southern and middle colonies; the slave system was less repressive there as a result. In colonial Massachusetts (which then included Maine), slaves did retain some very limited legal rights and protections, such as the right to sue and the right to testify in court.[10] Only very late in the existence of the institution in northern New England were runaways to become somewhat more common, though even then only one known case occurred in Maine.[11] Marriage of slaves was restricted to other slaves, as in the cases of Lonnon, Chloe, Prince, and Dinah, discussed later. There are only three other recorded slave marriages in Cumberland County before 1780. This comparative rarity of marriages seems attributable to the shortage of enslaved women.[12]

Baptismal records exist for nine or ten slaves from late colonial Cumberland County. The Christianity of at least four more may be assumed, because they were married in church. If so, this would represent at least a thirty-four percent baptismal rate for the identifiable slaves of late colonial Cumberland County, although the figure may have been as high sixty-six percent.[13] A master's control even extended beyond death. Burial of some slaves in Cumberland County appears to have been restricted to their own poorly-marked cemeteries, well segregated from those of European Americans. Some who had been freed, like Prince and his two wives, and who were church members, seem to have rated a better interment, with head stones, in town plots. It is also important to note that mulatto slaves, no matter how light-skinned, were regarded no differently under the law anywhere than very dark-skinned individuals.[14]

The ratio of free to slave in Falmouth by mid-century was over sixty to one. Some forty-four, mostly household slaves kept as status symbols, were resident in Falmouth by 1764, when the total population of Falmouth in Casco Bay was figured by the Reverend Thomas Smith to be 585 families, or about 3,500 people on the Neck, the half-square mile sea-

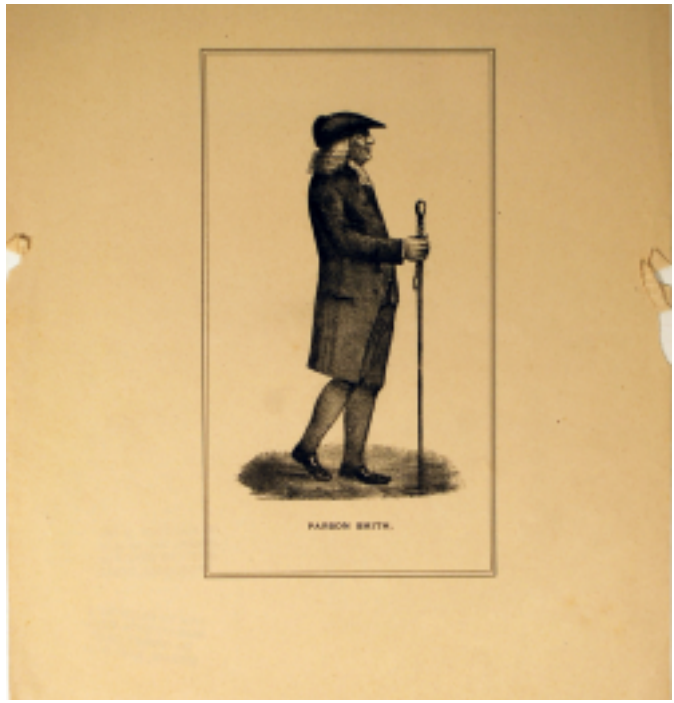
port area itself.[15] Falmouth as a whole had a population of about 5,000 people. The forty-four slaves there thus represented a little less than one percent of the total population of late colonial Falmouth. About seventy-five percent of the forty-four slaves named in Cumberland County records between 1760 and 1775 were male. Although there are some unresolved questions about the gender of certain slaves, it does appear that male slaves outnumbered women three to one, an important factor in the number of marriages, and thus of offspring, that were possible.[16]

Perhaps a little over half of Cumberland County's slaves whose names we know were domestic servants; probably all the women were. Three males, Plato, Primus, and Scipio, may have been employed irregularly as domestics. Of the twelve or thirteen remaining persons that were definitely not domestic servants, about thirty percent of the whole, only one was primarily an agricultural laborer: Prince. One should not, however, conclude from this that there was no agricultural slavery in Cumberland County; it may be said that five or six others, with reasonable certainty, were often used as farm laborers. For the remainder, no identifiable role as yet has been found.[17]

Not all domestic slaves in Cumberland County worked in their owner's house. Three were employed as inn staff: Agrippa (also known as "Grippy)," Cato III, and Phyllis I. They were all owned by Johanna Sparhawk Frost, and employed during the 1760s and 1770s in the running of her large inn on the County Road (Congress Street) at the northeastern end of the Stroudwater bridge. Grippy and Cato came to her early in her marriage to Charles Frost, while Phyllis appears to have arrived later. They were, it appears, engaged in all aspects of inn-keeping, from chamber cleaning to horse stalling.[18]

The Reverend John Wiswall of St. Paul's Anglican Parish owned several slaves of whom we know the names: Boston, Bradstreet, Juba, and Sylva. The last two were still pre-teen children in 1775. All were almost certainly domestic servants, the two children attendant upon Mr. Wiswall's wife and children, and Bradstreet an assistant to the Reverend Wiswall himself. Those three appear to have left Falmouth with the Wiswalls when they fled in 1775 and 1776. There is, however, at present no sign of their having been with Wiswall when he resettled in 1783, a loyalist refugee and poor widower, at Cornwallis, Nova Scotia. Boston, on the other hand, appears to have been either sold locally or freed before the Wiswall family's departure, and may have been known later as "Black Boston."[19]

Chloe, wife first of Lonnon and then of Prince, of whom more will



The Reverend Thomas Smith wrote a detailed journal of life in late colonial Falmouth. Smith ministered to the First Parish Church in Falmouth in the mid-eighteenth century. Maine Historical Society Collections.

be said shortly, was probably a domestic servant for the Mayberrys of Windham. Another, London, was probably the personal servant to Daniel Dole of Stroudwater. He continued to live with his former master in the old Waldo mansion until Dole's death, and is said to have outlived him by nine years. Moses, belonging to Judge Minot of Brunswick, was in all likelihood also a personal servant, as were Plato, belonging to Cary McLellan; Rose, belonging to the household of Moses Pearson; Samuel, a child belonging to Hannah Williams; and Sylvia, a little girl servant belonging to the Reverend Samuel Deane. Scipio may also have functioned as a domestic or personal servant, at least from time to time, since late in life he attempted to defend his absent master Francis Waldo's possessions from confiscation under the Massachusetts Banishment Act of 1778, which targeted loyalists. Finally, there was Dinah, who came to the prominent Alexander Ross household as a little girl. She appears to have been a personal servant to Mrs. Ross, and it may be presumed that she went with her mistress to reside in Gorham after the destruction of Falmouth in 1775.[20]

The majority of known slaves in Falmouth and Cumberland County between 1760 and 1775 worked as domestic servants. Five more were probably unskilled laborers, and the rest, less than twenty-five percent of the known total, had roles that are presently indefinable. In other words, the roles of over seventy-five percent of the named slaves in late colonial Cumberland County can, with considerable certainty, be identified.[21] Provided these slaves survived until the early 1780s, and remained resident in Maine, they all became free under the provisions of the new Massachusetts Constitution of 1780.[22]

Although the stories of most slaves went largely undocumented, historians have found creative ways to glean what little information they can about the lives of enslaved African Americans. As slavery was less important in Maine than in other colonies, slaves' lives there were perhaps less documented than in other colonies. However, available sources allow some quite distinct personalities to emerge from obscurity. One case can be analyzed based on visual inspection alone. There is a single known portrait of a slave from late colonial Falmouth or Cumberland County: Phyllis II, the personal servant of Elizabeth Hunt Wendell Smith, wife of Windham's Reverend Peter Smith. Phyllis was given as a child to Elizabeth, then a young woman. Mrs. Smith brought Phyllis with her when she came to Windham in the early 1760s, and Phyllis was baptized in 1764.[23]

The portrait of Phyllis is a dummy board, which is a life-size artist's rendering of the subject.[24] This "dummy board" is in fact a very good portrait, not a "primitive" at all. An artist with considerable command of perspective and proportion executed it. The painting, known today as "The Phyllis," shows a short, slender, oval-faced woman with a slightly "weak" chin, brown curly hair, and clear, amused light-brown eyes. She has a small if full mouth bent in a slight smile and an unmistakably fair complexion. We know for that reason that Phyllis was a mulatto. Phyllis' physiognomy shows no clearly African features, either real or stereotypical; she would be unidentifiable as a slave when in a crowd of European Americans, except, perhaps, because of her bearing or her costume.

Her attitude, indicated in the position of her head, is clearly one of definite but placid submission. She is portrayed in three-quarter frontal presentation, reinforcing her submissive posture, facing the viewer's right, as though stepping into a room, bearing a tray with a chocolate service on it. She wears a plain linen wimple, from under which a few tight curls appear on her forehead, a modest but well-tailored bodice and full skirt of contrasting brown homespuns, an apron that covers the

Phyllis was the servant of Elizabeth Hunt Wendell Smith, the wife of Reverend Peter Smith of Windham. Phyllis's likeness was captured on a dummy board, a life-sized portrait of a subject that could act as a mute (or "dummy") stand-in for one's companion, or, in this case, servant. Like other portraiture, dummy boards were generally found only in the homes of the elite. The Phyllis dummy board is currently housed at the Hamilton House in South Berwick, Maine. Courtesy of Historic New England.

entire front of her skirt, and the shawl-like small clothes characteristic of the eighteenth century. Her clothing, though simple, is obviously well made, indicative of her possession by a well-to-do, if not wealthy, family.

Military records can also offer a glimpse into the lives of enslaved African Americans. As was relatively common elsewhere in New England, several slaves from Cumberland County served in the Continental Army during the War for Independence. As a result of their service, the six slaves from Cumberland County whom we know served appear to have been freed.[25] This, again, is a high proportion for a North American slave population in the latter part of the eighteenth century. Cato III, Flanders, Lonnon, Plato, Prince, and Romeo, who served as drummer for Captain Skillings' company in the Continental Army, all served with more or less distinction.[26]

Of the black Cumberland County servicemen, only one died while on active duty: Lonnon, who was owned by William Mayberry of Wind-

ham. His origins are at present unknown, but he may have served the Mayberrys as an agricultural and/or a common laborer. He was married to Chloe, whose ownership is unclear, in 1763 by the Reverend Peter Thatcher Smith in Windham. They had four children, all conceived in slavery.[27] Lonnon entered the army on January 20, 1777, and bought his freedom two days later for £20, the bounty he had received for volunteering. Very soon thereafter he marched out of Cumberland County and never returned. He, with his company, went first to Massachusetts, then to Vermont, New York, and New Jersey, fighting along the way at Ticonderoga, Hubbardston, Stillwater, and Saratoga, where he witnessed British General John Burgoyne's surrender. He was with General Washington at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, during their desperate winter encampment there, and died, presumably of complications arising from that ordeal, on December 9, 1777. He is buried at Whitemarsh Encampment, New Jersey. His widow and orphans stayed in Windham, but they remained bereft of a husband and father respectively for only some six years, until about 1783, when Chloe appears to have married Prince, a veteran who was officially freed that year.[28]

Prince is said to have been born in Guinea, West Africa, sometime between 1729 and 1739. He had been kidnaped as a boy, and a little later bought in Antigua, c.1749, by Thomas Haskell (1688-1785) of Falmouth. Brought back to Cumberland County soon after, he was purchased in a barter by William "Uncle Billy" McLellan, Sr., to be trained as a personal servant for Rebecca McLellan. Prince was baptized in 1751, while in his teens or early twenties. When he grew up, he was employed almost exclusively by the McLellans as an agricultural laborer. Even though Prince was not tall, he was renowned for feats of strength. He was also entrusted with important errands, though he seems not to have always carried them out to the entire fulfillment of the trust placed in him.[29] However, not long after the beginning of the War for Independence, he slipped away to join a crew under the command of Captain John Manley (1733-1793), Washington's first commodore in the Continental Navy, then engaged in the blockade and siege of Boston. Manley's privateers conducted raids in the Caribbean from 1777 through 1781, capturing many British merchant vessels. In 1783, Prince was part of the crew of *The Hague*, Manley's frigate of thirty-two guns, with which he took four more prizes in the Caribbean.[30]

Prince remained with the renowned Manley until the end of the war. Upon his return home in 1783, Prince was rewarded with his freedom and a military pension. He thereupon appears to have married Chloe, and moved briefly to York County. However, he soon encoun-

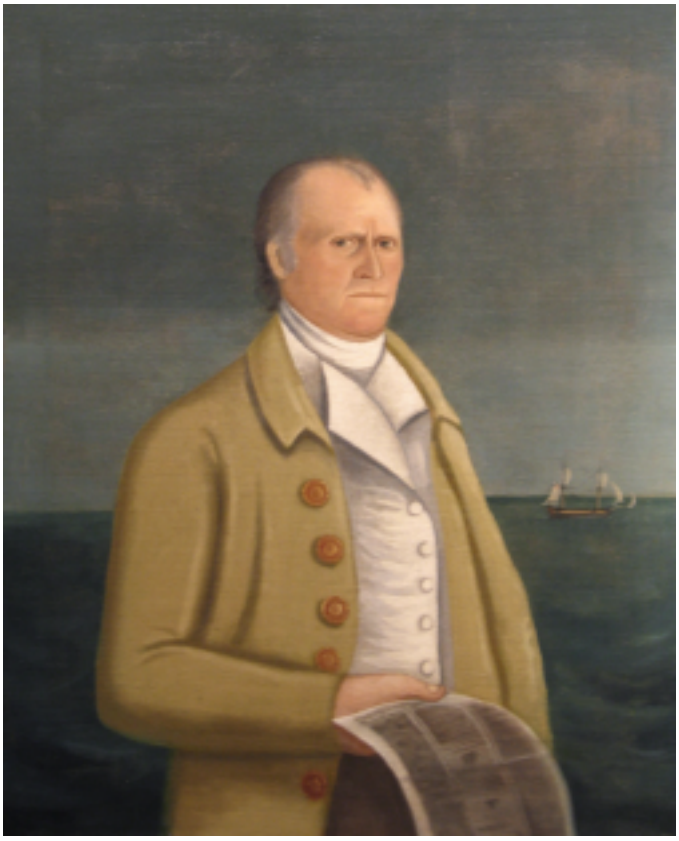
tered money troubles there and returned to Gorham, where McLellan gave him ten acres of land and a house. He lived another forty-six years in freedom. In 1827, Chloe died, and he married again, while in his eighties or nineties. His new wife was Dinah, here presumed to have been the former personal servant, then about fifty-four years old, of Elizabeth Duguid Ross. Dinah had probably stayed on as a free retainer to Mrs. Ross' Gorham household, until the latter's death in 1798, and then served the former Cumberland County Sheriff William Tyng and his wife Elizabeth, the Ross's only child and heir. Dinah died in 1840, aged seventy-seven, while her husband passed away sometime in the intervening thirteen years (at the end of his life, he liked to brag that he was over one hundred years old). So their gravestone in Gorham's Eastern Cemetery declares as well, but this is not certain, either.[31]

The Massachusetts Constitution of 1780, the composition of which several prominent former residents of Falmouth had a hand, indirectly outlawed slavery in Maine by declaring that "all men are born free and equal." The validity of this clause as an anti-slavery clause was upheld in consequence of lawsuits presided over by Chief Justice William Cushing and the Massachusetts Supreme Court in 1783, and the matter was then considered closed.[32] Uncertainty about the document's meaning in the early 1780s led at least one Cumberland County slave, Limbo, to run away from his master. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a number of former slaves appear to have been resident in Gorham, including the acclaimed but sometimes undependable Prince and his two successive wives, Thomas Francis and his wife Mary Ludlow, and Neptune Stephenson and his wife, Mary Pollard. It is not presently evident that any lived in Portland.[33]

Poor Free Menial Laborers

Since most slaves in late colonial Falmouth and Cumberland County, Maine, were domestic servants, and if the rest of the slaves were far too few to fill an intensifying need for semi-skilled and unskilled laborers there, then poor free menial workers would have been required for the smooth conduct of business. The problem is that there is so little hard data at hand to prove they even existed.

Because of the shortage of labor in the colonies, social boundaries were more permeable, and standards for social status more flexible, than they were in Britain, and even more so in New England than in more southerly colonies. Immigrants, not only from elsewhere in the region but from Europe as well, found themselves able to establish land ownership in Maine with relative ease and to begin to enhance their social



William McLellan, Sr., son of the town handyman Bryce McLellan, rose to social and economic prominence in late colonial Falmouth and early national period Portland. McLellan was a leading town merchant and a slaveowner. Maine Historical Society Collections.

standing in the community. Even women might own shops, inns, taverns, or small cottage industries.[34]

Colonial society in Falmouth was relatively open, in that there were in fact a number of modes or paths available there for social mobility, and a variety of rates of accession that varied according to market demand rather than legal or normative stricture, except, of course, in the case of slaves. Nonetheless, social boundaries, typically demarcated by family connection, were not entirely removed, despite the fact that more emphasis tended to be put on skill and accomplishment, civic and military service, and education in Falmouth than was perhaps true in England or in the middle and southern colonies. Power, represented by property or money, remained in the hands of comparatively few families

or individuals. Although not all were poor, most European settlers in British North America labored long and hard for their daily bread and had few luxuries. Consequently, the situation regarding poor but free menial laborers in Falmouth and Cumberland County was radically different from that of the slaves there. The less important an individual was, the fewer records there were left of his or her life and career. As historian Meyer Weinberg has noted:

> Just months before the Revolution, the lower 60 percent of Americans owned nothing. The bottom third of that grouping consisted almost wholly of enslaved workers. The remaining two-thirds were made up largely of free laborers, tenants, women, and paupers…. In describing the distribution of wealth, [historians and economists] have simply omitted the landless or those without any net worth.[35]

Poor menial laborers, in other words, were neglected members of colonial society, and few records at all remain of their ever having been.

Yet "negative evidence," as previously suggested, signifies that they must have dwelt in or around Falmouth, and in considerable numbers. Low-level semi-skilled or unskilled laborers were needed in Falmouth to act as crane operators, tugboatmen, longshoremen, swabbies, and in even more elementary roles. Most of these workers, then, had of necessity to be free poor men and women of predominantly European rather than mostly African extraction, though a number were also undoubtedly of mixed race. There is, in fact, documentary evidence of poor wage-earning laborers in large numbers in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, and it may be safely assumed that some in New England, at least, gravitated to Falmouth in the late 1760s and early 1770s, where there was plentiful work to be had.[36]

Unfortunately, we have only the vaguest notion of these peoples' condition, gleaned mostly, as noted before, from sheriff's and court records, such as summonses and arrest warrants, civil complaints, convictions, and penalties. All we know of Solomon Goodwin, for instance, is associated with his conviction for murder in 1772. A poor, landless trapper from the vicinity of what would later become Bowdoinham, he was tried and hung in Falmouth for the slaying of one David Wilson, an associate, also otherwise anonymous.[37]

Although there seems to be no direct evidence of prostitution in Falmouth, it is likely to have existed, even if on a smaller scale than in other east coast seaports. In Falmouth alone, between 1760 and 1775, there were between eighteen and twenty-seven reported cases of childbirth to

unwed women. Some of these, perhaps as many as twenty-one, may have been to prostitutes. Such promiscuity, especially among the poor, was by no means uncommon in the British North American colonies.[38]

The poor free menial laborers of Falmouth in Casco Bay had few outlets for their emotions and hardly any options for relaxation. They seem to have been attracted in large numbers, in their rare idle hours, to Fiddle Lane (now the Franklin Arterial), which was notorious for its taverns, alehouses, and rum shops. Often drunk, they regularly got into trouble with the law.[39] It appears that the inebriated mobs that so often disrupted life in Falmouth, Boston, New York, and Philadelphia throughout the latter 1760s and the early 1770s contained large numbers of the poor, who were motivated more by the excitement of the situation and the likely prospect of free alcohol, than by any political or ideological commitment.[40]

Circumstances forced these people to adopt a mercenary, vagrant attitude. A loose band referred to as the "Sumac Gatherers" provides an example of this condition, directly analogous to that of migrant workers in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. These poor laborers arrived in coastal Cumberland County in October every year to harvest sumac leaves. The Sumac Gatherers performed a useful economic function, by doing a dirty job that no one else wanted. The pickers went into the tangled, marginal areas the trees prefer, tied the malodorous crimson sumac leaves into bundles, and then sold them to local tanneries, such as the very large operation owned by the Cottons at Hodgkin's (now Gorham's) corner, at the southwestern end of Fore Street in Falmouth. Nothing is known about the individuals that made up this group. They appear to have had a distinctive, even vibrant culture, camping in marginal spaces, socializing, cooking, and sleeping in the open.[41]

It may be that, of all the laborers in Cumberland County, the Sumac Gatherers were the only group that had any sort of genuine "collective consciousness." Such, however, would have been that of an "in-group," because of its size, rather than of a class or caste. They were certainly not in a position to act as a special-interest group or faction, for they had no political power, and no means of coercion other than mob and riot. Nowhere is there a suggestion that the Sumac Gatherers, as such, employed either of these actions, though individual members could have. In the evenings these poor migrant laborers, and a number of local slaves who had permission, would gather for songs, dancing, and story telling. Slaves Caesar and his wife, Hagar I, are known to have regularly attended these revels. It is probable that the Sumac Gatherers actually

Falmouth was destroyed by the Royal Navy on October 18, 1775. The town of Portland eventually rose from Falmouth's ashes after the Revolutionary War. Maine Historical Society Collections.

moved about according to the seasons, merging with or detaching from similar groups as occasion called for, and losing or acquiring new members. They almost certainly ranged as far and wide as foot travel would allow them, finding what work they could, filling out the labor force of such places as Falmouth, Gorham, or Scarborough on a temporary and generally unrecorded basis.[42]

Perhaps the best example we have of the laboring poor in late colonial Falmouth is the town handyman, Bryce McLellan (1698?-1776). Yet even he is not a great example of the menial laboring poor, because he became a landowner, if in a very small way and in a marginal area. He traded on a very limited, local basis with such men as Captain Ephraim Jones, and in time held a few very low-level town offices. He never rose high in the social strata of colonial Falmouth.[43]

Born in Ireland of Scots-Irish parents, he was first trained as a weaver. In his late twenties, confronted with a lack of work and the prospect of poverty in northern Ireland, he emigrated first to Wells, Maine, and then to Cape Elizabeth in 1728. Shortly thereafter, he removed again, to the port area in Falmouth, where he remained the rest of his life. There was little call for his weaving skills there, but he proved himself industrious and clever with his hands. Eventually, "Mac," as he was commonly known, became familiar throughout the port community, the person upon whom Falmouth's social elite most often called to

make small household repairs and alterations. He proved adept enough with hand tools to work from time to time as a ship's carpenter, though apparently only along shore.

Through his connections and due to his diligence, Mac McLellan was able to apprentice his sons to seamen, farmers, and businessmen. They, in turn, were able to build up wealth and property for themselves, pursuing mercantile and professional paths to greater rates of social accession. Their children, in turn, were accepted readily into the elite of nineteenth century Portland society. By the time Mac died in 1776, his sons, especially "Uncle Billy," were prominent members of the emerging post-revolutionary Cumberland County social order, and would be leaders in the reestablishment of the town as Portland.

In this, Mac's family was little different from that of other prominent citizens of colonial Falmouth and then of republican Portland (or of such towns as Boston and Philadelphia) who had arrived in Maine with little or nothing. Although, as historian Lucy Simler put it, "few persons who climbed the tenurial ladder from laborer to farm tenant were able to acquire capital or credit early enough in life to buy improved land…and then retire their debts without help from their families or by income from a trade," it was possible.[44] It was by no means a sure thing. For example, William Hans, commonly known as "Billy," though a small landowner at the corner of Love Lane (Center Street) and Back Street (Congress Street), appears never to have risen above poverty.[45]

One aspiring real estate owner, Benjamin Mussey (1722-1787), who very much wanted to be part of "polite society," failed because he was considered crude or confrontational, in spite of some wealth and property. Another, Jonathan "Don" Webb (1736-1789), who had originally been very well placed, lost social position because of sloth or indigence. In spite of coming from a prominent Boston family (he was ranked fourth in the Harvard class of 1754) and having married well in Falmouth, he proved an indolent, if genteel, wastrel, drawing the opprobrium of no less an acquaintance than that of his own distant cousin, John Adams. Eventually, Webb had to resort to taking in boarders to get by.[46] In spite of these exceptions, originally poor individuals such as McLellan, might, through industry, investment, and thrift, gain advantage for their children, if no real increase in social status for themselves.

Most menial laborers and the poor, though, unlike "Mac" McLellan, had no such connections, resources, or even geographic stability. Everywhere, debt was persistent among them, and those in Cumberland

County appear to have been no exception. They almost never accumulated real property and therefore paid no taxes, were not members of the churches, and so are not recorded for baptisms and marriages, and never joined fraternal organizations. They failed to obtain sufficient skills to make their services sought after, and thus never established relationships with well-placed individuals who could help their advancement, nor obtained any position of responsibility and trust. The persistently poor suffered from malnutrition and chronic disease, lack of training, and mental or substance abuse problems. The socially deviant might not or could not accept the rigors of regular employment. All were more subject to sudden death than their better-off counterparts, often followed by the summary disposal of their remains, usually at town expense.[47] John Fleet and Aaron McLean, poor Scottish immigrants, both twenty-six years old in 1760, together are a case in point. Employed by Alexander Ross, the town's leading merchant, they were killed in the accidental collapse of the floor in his imported-wheat granary on March 23, 1760. They were buried together in a single grave two days later.[48]

The lives of these poor menial laborers, then, conformed to Thomas Hobbes' characterization in his *Leviathan* (1651) of the lot of "natural," or common, men as "poor, nasty, brutish and short." They undoubtedly alleviated the labor shortage, but the burden they imposed upon society over the years is evidenced by the need for a workhouse and church charity, a certain recognized lawlessness, and general social deviance.[49] If such ports as Boston, New York, and Philadelphia are any indication, their living conditions were miserable, and gradually became more wretched as the 1760s and 1770s progressed.[50] Although some were eventually to become squatters in the distant hinterlands of Lincoln and Hancock counties, most simply vanished altogether after the destruction of the port of Falmouth in Casco Bay on October 18, 1775.[51]

Conclusion

In the 1760s and 1770s, the town of Falmouth and the surrounding county of Cumberland experienced a period of economic growth. As in other colonial cities, workers were needed to do the menial tasks of a colonial economy. Although slavery did exist in colonial Maine, slaves did not serve the economic function that they did in other colonies, especially the southern colonies. African American slaves represented perhaps one percent of late colonial Falmouth's population and most were kept as domestic servants for the elite of the town and county. In need of labor because of the forest products industry, Falmouth's business own-

ers must have turned to free laborers of European descent. These laborers were used for menial jobs and were almost certainly poor and often transient. All of the laboring poor, not only in Falmouth, but in the rest of Maine and New England, tended to be geographically displaced, prone to criminality, subject to harassment by authorities, and, above all, socially marginalized and therefore very poorly documented. With the slaves of Cumberland County, named and anonymous, they are part of a melancholy company of shadows forever haunting the twilight margins of Maine's colonial history.

NOTES

1. Richard Hofstadter, *America at 1750: A Social Portrait* (New York: Knopf, 1971), pp. 3-32; Christine Daniels, "'Getting His [or Her] Livelyhood': Free Workers in Slave Anglo-America, 1675-1810," *Agricultural History* 71 (Spring 1997): 125.

2. Charles P. M. Outwin, "An Index of Persons and Institutions for Studies of Falmouth in Casco Bay, c. 1760-1775," Maine Historical Society (hereafter MHS), Portland. This index lists mostly heads of household, rate payers, and church members, resident in or important to the affairs of the town, as well as institutions and slaves. It represents an effort to draw together vital statistics and other personal data drawn from such sources as church and cemetery records; municipal, county, and tax registers; law enforcement and legal documents; and contemporary personal and family papers, in both published and manuscript form. The seed document for the index is a registry of claimants for reparation of losses due to the British attack of October 1775, composed in 1776 under the direction of Samuel Freeman, and later published as an appendix to William Willis' *History of Portland* in 1865 ("Losses Sustained by the Inhabitants in the Destruction of the Town, October 18, 1775," in Appendix XVIII, pp. 900-902). That data, reorganized alphabetically, was extensively augmented by information from well over one hundred other sources, both primary and secondary, and lists, where possible, each individual's vital statistics, his or her occupation, a variety of primary and secondary socioeconomic attributes, and notes regarding personal history.

3. Herbert S. Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 17-46.

4. Meyer Weinberg, *A Short History of American Capitalism* (Chicago: New History Press, 2002), pp. 31-59, available online at www.newhistory.org/CH03.htm. See also John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), pp. 103-136, 154, 172, 203.

5. Barbara L. Solow, "The Transatlantic Slave Trade: A New Census," *William & Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 58 (2001): 9-17; Charles P. M. Outwin, "Securing the Leg Irons: Restriction of Legal Rights for Slaves in Virginia and Maryland, 1625-1791," *The Early America Review: A Journal of Fact and Opinion on the People, Issues and Events of 18th Century America* (Winter 1996), available online: www.earlyamerica.com/review/winter96/slavery.html.

6. William Pierson, *Black Yankees: The Development of an Afro-American Sub-Culture in Eighteenth-Century New England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), pp. 26-27.

7. See records concerning Moses Pearson (1697-1778) with documents dating from c.1697 to c.1900, Collections #34, 64, 422 (page 33), 430 (boxes 1/25, 3/8 and 4/6), 1065, 1591 (box 2/6), S-335 (box 12/31), S-1276 (box 61/12), S 1823 (box 85/18-19), and S-1924 (box 91/8), MHS. See also the "Bill of sale for a slave in Kittery, Maine, dating from 1748-9," in *An Eliot Miscellany* (Boston: Alfred Little, 1876), p. ii.

8. See Randolph Stakeman, "Slavery in Colonial Maine," *Maine Historical Society Quarterly* 27 (Fall 1987): 58-81; Ira Berlin, "Time, Space, and the Evolution of Afro-American Society on British Mainland North America," *American Historical Review* 83 (February 1980): 44-78; Lee Lawrence, "Chronicling Black Lives in Colonial New England," *Christian Science Monitor*, October 29, 1997, pp. 15-16.

9. Samuel Freeman and William Willis, eds., *Journals of the Rev. Thomas Smith, and the Rev. Samuel Deane, Pastors of the First Church in Portland* (Portland: Joseph S. Baily, 1849), p. 267; Robert J. Taylor, G.L. Lint, and C. Walker, eds., Letter of July 9, 1774, *The Papers of John Adams*, Series III (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1983).

10. Piersen, *Black Yankees*, pp. 25-36; Stakeman, "Slavery in Colonial Maine," pp. 68-71.

11. Joseph Williamson, "Slavery in Maine," *Collection of the Maine Historical Society*, 7 (1867): 212. The one known case of a fugitive slave in colonial Maine is confirmed by an affidavit taken out in February of 1775 by one Captain McIntyre, contained among the Silvester Gardiner papers (1775-1779), Collections 41, box 1/4, MHS.

12. See Charles P.M. Outwin, "An Index of Named Slaves at Falmouth in Casco Bay (Portland) and in Lower Cumberland County, Maine, c. 1760-1775," MHS.

13. Outwin, "An Index of Named Slaves at Falmouth."

14. Outwin, "An Index of Named Slaves at Falmouth."

15. Freeman and Willis, eds, *Journals of the Rev. Thomas Smith, and the Rev. Samuel Deane*, p. 137, fn 2. Smith actually says there were 3,770 people; I have used a more conservative estimate.

16. Outwin, "An Index of Named Slaves at Falmouth."

17. Outwin, "An Index of Named Slaves at Falmouth."

18. Outwin, "An Index of Named Slaves at Falmouth."

19. Outwin, "An Index of Named Slaves at Falmouth."

20. Outwin, "An Index of Named Slaves at Falmouth."

21. Outwin, "An Index of Named Slaves at Falmouth"; Williamson, "Slavery in Maine," 212.

22. Stakeman, "Slavery in Colonial Maine," 75-77; *The Continental Journal and Weekly Advertiser* (Boston), December 27, 1781.

23. Outwin, "An Index of Named Slaves at Falmouth." The dummy board of Phyllis is kept at the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities' Hamilton House Museum, South Berwick, Maine. See "Court Rejects Heir's Attempts to Recover Painting," *Portland Press Herald*, March 29, 1994.

24. On the uses of dummy boards in colonial America see Clive Edwards, "Dummy Board Figures as Images of Amusement and Deception in Interiors, 1660-1800," *Studies in the Decorative Arts* 10 (Fall-Winter 2002-2003).

25. On the presence of black troops in the Patriot forces during the Revolutionary War see Gary B. Nash, *The Forgotten Fifth: African Americans in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 7-15.

26. Outwin, "An Index of Named Slaves at Falmouth." See also Emma L. Dumant, *Heritage "'76": Soldiers of the American Revolution in Windham, Maine* (Westbrook, ME: Cobb Press, 1975), pp. 87, 89, 105.

27. Outwin, "An Index of Named Slaves at Falmouth." The children of Lonnon and Chloe were: Harry, born in 1766, who may later have been known in Kennebunk records, c.1781, as "Black Harry"; Robin, born 1768, of whom no other record appears to exist; Lucy, born 1772, and later known and well liked as "Black Luce," who died at Little Falls, Windham, in 1839, aged sixty-seven, and is buried at Brown Cemetery in South Windham; and Hagar, born in 1775, about whom nothing else is known.

28. Outwin, "An Index of Named Slaves at Falmouth."

29. Outwin, "An Index of Named Slaves at Falmouth." See also Donald A. Yerxa, *The Significance of the Falmouth Affair* (Portland: Maine Academic Historians, 1975), p. 24.

30. Outwin, "An Index of Named Slaves at Falmouth."

31. Outwin, "An Index of Named Slaves at Falmouth."

32. Daniel, R. Coquillette, ed., *Law in Colonial Massachusetts, 1630 – 1800: A Conference Held on 6 & 7 November 1981 by the Colonial Society of Massachusetts* (Boston: Colonial Society of Massachusetts/University Press of Virginia, 1985), p. 582; Dorothy Libbey, *Scarborough Becomes a Town* (Freeport, ME: Bond Wheelwright, 1955), p. 93.

33. Outwin, "An Index of Named Slaves at Falmouth."

34. Weinberg, *A Short History of American Capitalism*, p. 47. On women in New England see Elaine Forman Crane, *Ebb Tide in New England: Women, Seaports, and Social Change, 1630-1800* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), pp. 103-104; 139-173.

35. Weinberg, *A Short History of American Capitalism*, p. 46.

36. Weinberg, *A Short History of American Capitalism*, pp. 45-46; Alice Hanson Jones, *Wealth of a Nation to Be: The American Colonies on the Eve of the Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 45. Indentured servitude, as commonly understood today, was actually rare, even unknown, in Maine.

37. William Willis, *The History of Portland from 1632 to 1864: With a Notice of Previous Settlements, Colonial Grants, and Changes of Government in Maine* (Portland: Bailey & Noyes, 1865), p. 635. See also David Allen Hearn, *Legal Executions in New England: A Comprehensive Reference, 1623-1960* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1999), p. 154.

38. Richard Godbeer, *Sexual Revolution in Early America: Gender Relations in the American Experience* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), pp. 137-138. There appear to be several other such citations in Sheriff Moses Pearson's records at the Maine Historical Society in addition to the presence suggested by the index of fornication charges. Figures taken from Dana E. Edgecomb, *Fornication Charges in Cumberland County, 1759-1790, from the Cumberland County Commissioners records*, available online at http://ftp.rootsweb.com/pub/usgenweb/me/cumberland/court/adultery/file0001.txt.

39. Sarah Jones Bradbury diary (1750-1766), p. 13, MHS; Freeman and Willis, eds., *The Journals of the Rev. Thomas Smith and the Rev. Samuel Deane*, pp. 206-207, 213-214, 220, 317, 319. See also the Moses Pearson Papers, MHS.

40. Gary B. Nash, *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 258-275.

41. Libbey, *Scarborough Becomes a Town*, pp. 88-93.

42. Libbey, *Scarborough Becomes a Town*, pp. 88-89.

43. William Willis, "A Walk Among the Ruins," *Portland Transcript*, August 11 and 18, 1866; Edwin A. Churchill, "Merchants and Commerce in Falmouth (1774-1775)," *Maine Historical Society Newsletter* 9 (May 1977): 94; Ephraim Jones' original account books are in the William Willis Papers, volumes Ja, Jb, and K, MHS.

44. Lucy Simler, "Tenancy in Colonial Pennsylvania: The Case of Chester County," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 43 (October 1986): 560.

45. Outwin, "An Index of Persons and Institutions for Studies of Falmouth in Casco Bay," MHS.

46. Outwin, "An Index of Persons and Institutions for Studies of Falmouth in Casco Bay," MHS; Israel Thorn's deposition, 1807, copied by Albert J. Sears from Book 53, p. 370, of the Cumberland County Registry of Deeds, Collection 3468, MHS; Charles Francis Adams, ed., *The Works of John Adams, Volume 2: Diary, Notes of Debates, Autobiography* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1850-56), pp. 245-246.

47. Carole Shammas, "The Rise of the Colonial Tenant," *Reviews in American History* 6 (December 1978): 492; Simler, "Tenancy in Colonial Pennsylvania"; Stephen Innes, "Land Tenancy and Social Order in Springfield, Massachusetts, 1652 to 1702," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 35 (January 1978): 43-44.

48. Freeman and Willis, eds., *Journals*, pp. 183-184.

49. William David Berry, *The History of Sweetser-Children's Home: A Century and a Half of Service to Maine Children* (Portland, ME: The Anthoensen Press, 1988), pp. 9-11. See also Freeman and Willis, eds., *Journals*, pp. 188-189, 456.

50. John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), pp. 206, 254; Billy S. Smith, "Inequality in Late Colonial Philadelphia: A Note on Its Nature and Growth," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 41 (October 1984): 636; Nash, The Urban Crucible, p. 258.

51. Alan Taylor, *Liberty Men and Great Proprietors: The Revolutionary Settlement on the Maine Frontier, 1760-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).